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Cover: Western milksnake, *Lampropeltis gentilis* (= Utah milksnake, *Lampropeltis triangulum taylori*), Tooele County, Utah. Photograph by Stephen Barten.

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**Notes on Mexican Herpetofauna 33:
A New Record for the Green Ratsnake (*Senticolis triaspis*) from Cerro de las Mitras,
a Sky Island in the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey, Nuevo León, México**

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Larry David Wilson³**

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Abstract

The enormous growth of the of Monterrey Metropolitan Area has converted the surrounding mountains (Cerro de la Silla, Cerro del Topo Chico, Sierra Madre and Cerro de las Mitras) into sky islands (i.e., isolated montane regions) because the dense human population, now almost 4.5 million, has disrupted the flow of vertebrate species. This growth in all directions has absorbed 12 of the 18 municipalities of the center of the state of Nuevo León (INEGI, 2015). This study documents a new record of *Senticolis triaspis* (green ratsnake / *culebra ratonera verde*) from the area of Sierra “Cerro de las Mitras” in the municipalities of García, Monterrey, Santa Catarina, and San Pedro Garza-García, Nuevo León, México. We observed and photographed an unsexed adult in piedmont scrub on 4 November 2018. This finding represents the first record of this snake for this area and extends its range of distribution ca. 24.2 airline-km from the closest locality in Cerro de la Silla.

Resumen

El enorme crecimiento del area metropolitana de Monterrey ha convertido las montañas (Cerro de la Silla, Cerro del Topo Chico, Sierra Madre y Cerro Las Mitras) en las islas del cielo, porque su crecimiento poblacional, que ahora es de 4,437,643 tiene interrumpe el flujo de especies vertebrados. Este crecimiento en todas direcciones ha absorbido 12 de los 18 municipios del centro del estado de Nuevo León (INEGI, 2015). Este estudio documenta un nuevo récord de *Senticolis triaspis* (culebra ratonera verde / *green ratsnake*) de la zona de la Sierra “Cerro de las Mitras” en los municipios de García, Monterrey, Santa Catarina y San Pedro Garza García, Nuevo León, México. Observamos y fotografiamos un adulto sin secar en un bosque submontane en 4 de noviembre de 2018. Este hallazgo representa el primer registro de esta serpiente para esta zona y amplía su rango de distribución aprox. 24.2 km de línea aérea de la localidad más cercana en que fue Cerro de la Silla.

Introduction

The green ratsnake (*Senticolis triaspis*) has a broad geographic distribution, ranging from the southwestern United States, southern Nuevo León, and central Tamaulipas south through the remainder of Mexico and much of Central America to Costa Rica. The species occurs at low and moderate elevations ranging from near sea level to over 2200 m (Dowling and Fries, 1987; Price, 1991; Lazcano et al., 1992; Contreras-Balderas et al., 1995; Lee, 1996; Schulz, 1996; Lavín-Murcio et al., 2002; Savage, 2002; Dixon and Werler, 2005; Lavín-Murcio et al., 2005; Vázquez-Díaz and Quintero-Díaz, 2005; Ochoa-Ochoa et al., 2006; Lemos-Espinal and Smith, 2007a, b; Pérez-Higareda et al., 2007; Rhoads, 2008; Dixon and Lemos-Espinal, 2010; Lavín-Murcio and Lazcano, 2010; Lazcano et al., 2010; Ramírez-Bautista et al., 2010; McCranie, 2011; Lemos-Espinal and Dixon, 2013; Narváez-Torres and Lazcano-Villareal, 2013; Lemos-Espinal et al., 2016; Nevárez de los Reyes et al., 2016; Terán-Juárez et al., 2016; Lemos-Espinal et al., 2018). The first

report for *Senticolis triaspis* from southern Nuevo León on Federal Highway #58 (now #31 that runs from Linares to San Roberto), in Canyon Elena, municipality of Iturbide, Nuevo León, was documented by Lazcano et al. (1992). The northernmost record of the species for Nuevo León was reported by Chávez-Cisneros et al. (2014) from Cerro de la Silla. There has never been any intensive study on Cerro de las Mitras, which is now bounded by houses on both northern and southern sides. Strangely, this species has not been reported from the state of Coahuila, even though the state lies between Nuevo León and Chihuahua (reported in the latter state by Lemos-Espinal and Smith [2007a]).

Study Site

Cerro de las Mitras is a mountainous area of sedimentary origin, whose maximum altitude exceeds 2000 m. It was declared as a state Natural Protected Area in the year 2000 (Anonymous, 2000). Ramírez-Álvarez (1984) reported eight types of

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vegetation for Sierra de las Mitras, of which the submontane matorral, rosetophyllous desert scrub, and oak forest are the most significantly disturbed by human activity.

This mountain range consists primarily of limestone, whereas its lower parts are composed of alluvium and a small transitional strip is composed of limestone and shale. A zone of conglomerate is located on its southeastern end. In its southern part there is a strip of marble outcropping. This composition has allowed for the extraction of limestone and conglomerates that are used widely in the construction industry, as well as for the mining of marble (CETENAL, 1976).

According to CETENAL (1977) and Ramírez-Álvarez (1984), the vegetation that covers this mountain consists primarily of submontane scrub, while in its ravines and the middle portion of the sierra it supports oak forest, and at high elevations, pine forest. Also on its southern side, the most arid part, it harbors large areas of natural grasslands mixed with scrub. In most rocky parts, there exist areas of rosetophyllous desert scrub. Species present in the tree stratum are *Quercus polymorpha* (Mexican white oak / *encino roble*), *Q. grisea* (gray oak / *encino gris*), *Ebenopsis ebano* (Texas ebony tree / *ebano*), *Yucca treculeana* (spanish dagger / *chocha*), and *Yucca filifera* (*palma china* / *espadillo*); the shrub layer is made up of *Acacia rigidula* (blackbrush / *chaparro prieto*), *Calliandra eriophylla* (fairyduster / *charrasquillo*), *Croton fruticulosus* (bush croton / *hierba loca*), *Dasyllirion berlandieri* (blue giant sotol / *sotol*), *Dasyllirion wheeleri* (blue sotol / *sotol azul*), *Cordia boissieri* (wild olive / *anacahuita*), *Gymnospermum glutinosum* (gumhead / *tatalencho*), *Havardia pallens* (mimosa bush / *tenaza*), *Leucophyllum frutescens* (Texas sage / *cenizo*), *Zanthoxylum fagara* (wild lime / *colima*), *Casimiroa pringlei* (white sapote / *zapote blanco*), *Bernardia myricaefolia* (mouse's eye / *oreja de raton*), *Neopringlea integrifolia* (corvagallina tree / *palo estaca*), *Shaefferia cuneifolia* (desert yaupon / *sarampión*), *Karwinskia humboldtiana* (coyotito / *tuyidora*), *Opuntia* sp. (Prickly pear / *nopal*), and *Salvia ballotiflora* (shrubby blue sage / *salvia*). In this stratum one can also find *Bouteloua curtipendula* (sideoats grass / *banderilla*), *Bouteloua trifida* (red grama / *navajita roja*), *Bouteloua radicata* (purple grama / *navajita morada*), *Cylindropuntia leptocaulis* (Christmas cactus / *tasajillo*), *Echinocereus* sp. (Scarlet hedgehog cactus / *alicoche*), *Opuntia engelmannii* (Texas prickly pear / *nopal de Engelmann*), *Dyssodia pentachaeta* (dogweed /



Adult green ratsnake, *Senticolis triaspis*, in the submontane vegetation of Cerro de las Mitras. Photograph by Paulina Mata-Laredo.

limoncillo), *Heliotropium torreyi* (slimleaf / *heliotrope hoja delgada*), *Wedelia hispida* (orange zexmenia / *girasolito hispido*), *Tridens muticus* (slim tridens / *tridente esbelto*), *Erioneuron grandiflorum* (shortleaf woollygrass), *Euphorbia micromera* (Sonoran sandmat / *euphorbia tallo rojo*), *Aristida pansa* (Wootton's threeawn / *tres aristas perenne*), *Agave lechuguilla* (Shin dagger / *lechuguilla*), *Verbena Canadensis* (clump verbena / *verbena*), *Ruellia* sp. (wild petunia / *petunia*), *Aloysia gratissima* (whitebrush / *cedrón del monte*), *Lantana achyranthifolia* (brushland shrubverbena / *hierba mariposa*), *Setaria* sp. (bristlegrass / *cepilla*), *Citharexylum brachyantum* (fiddlewood / *agrito*), and *Mammillaria meiacantha* (little nipple cactus / *biznaga*).

Material and Methods

The study was carried out during a survey of ornithofauna on Cerro de las Mitras, in an area known as Colonia Vista Montaña on the north side in the municipality of San Pedro Garza-García. Our visit to the area encompassed 1–15 November 2018.

Results

During a ornithological survey on the northeastern slope of Cerro de las Mitras (25° 41' 17.38'' N; 100° 24' 18.66'' W, WGS 84; elevation 900 m) on 4 November 2018 at 9:25 A.M., we observed moving within the vegetation an adult *Senticolis triaspis* (UANL-8361). This occurred in a piedmont scrub or submontane scrub plant community with the dominant vegetation including *Ebenopsis ebano*, *Leucophyllum frutescens*, *Dasyllirion berlandieri*, *D. wheeleri*, *Neopringlea integrifolia*, *Agave lechuguilla*, *Cordia boissieri*, *Echinocereus* sp., *Opuntia engelmannii*, *Lantana achyranthifolia*, and *Mammillaria meiacantha*.

Discussion

In 2010 we observed a green ratsnake, moving around in a Texas ebony tree on Cerro de la Silla at 581 m in piedmont scrub or submontane scrub (Chávez-Cisneros, 2011; Chávez-Cisneros et al., 2014). This specimen was a photo voucher, UANL-7208, like the present finding. Although the green ratsnake is often thought to be extensively arboreal (Stebbins,



Localities for two *Senticolis triaspis* observed in the Monterrey Metropolitan Area in 2010 and 2018. Map created from Google Earth by Manuel Nevárez de los Reyes.



Typical submontane vegetation, with elements including corvagallina trees (*Neopringlea integrifolia*) and lechuguillas (*Agave lechuguilla*). Photograph by Paulina Mata-Laredo.



Typical submontane vegetation with Texas sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*). Houses can be seen in the background at the upper left. Photograph by Paulina Mata-Laredo.

2003), recent observations suggest that this might not be the case always (Sherbrooke, 2006; Radke and Malcom, 2009; Williams, 2010). The 2010 specimen was seen on the ground.

The sighting of this species in Cerro de las Mitras is at a distance of 24.2 km northwest of the 2010 locality; unfortunately, there is now no connection between Cerro de las Mitras and Cerro de la Silla because the intervening area has been urbanized. This finding suggests the possibility that the species occurs in northern mountain chains of Nuevo León in the Sierra “Gomas,” Sierra “Candela,” Sierra “Morena,” Sierra de la

Iguana, Sierra “Lampazos,” Sierra “Santa Clara” and Sierra “Bustamante,” near areas in Coahuila where it has not been reported yet.

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The south face of Cerro de las Mitras. The Monterrey Metropolitan Area enfolds the mountain. Photograph by Manuel Nevárez de los Reyes.



Canyons in the Cerro de las Mitras. Photograph by Manuel Nevárez de los Reyes.

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The Big Windy Utah Adventure of 2019

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In early May 2018, I was (mostly) with the same cast of characters who are about to be described elsewhere in this piece. We were somewhere in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. A full accounting of that adventure should have appeared somewhere in the hallowed pages of this publication—perhaps in June of 2018. This author suggested that somebody else who was present at this herpetological cornucopia of an adventure *should* be the person to write it up. The fact that I found nothing while everybody else was scoring left and right disqualified me from performing that duty. The sound of five pairs of flapping wings and excessive clucking noises was the only response to the request that somebody else chronicle our trip. I grew stubborn, thinking that if I refused steadfastly enough, one of these barnyard fowl would play mailman, and deliver for us. But nope! The chickens weren't going to do it, and morphed into mules during the scathing heckling process that ensued. They all pointed at me, ignoring the fact that as they pointed at me, three fingers were pointing right back at themselves.

Hence, the mother of all Cinderella herping days passed out of existence with nary a whimper from the lot of us. No, let's not shower the CHS members with tales of 50 or so Northern Pacific Rattlesnakes, more than 20 Gilbert's Skinks, 2 *gorgeous* Ring-necked snakes (see cover of August 2018 *Bulletin* for a great color image of one of these), a Gophersnake, a Striped Whipsnake, a Yellow-bellied Racer, and **NINE** California Mountain Kingsnakes that came our way! These and more all happened on 6 May 2018. Ralph Shepstone was the hero for most of this day. But then an event happened that caused his meteoric rise to fame to languish. He lapsed from hero to goat in less than ten seconds flat when he rolled a rock that had a Rubber Boa beneath it. Said Rubber Boa dove into a soil hole, and eluded him. During the scorn-laden "you write it, no, *you* write it" emails that followed in the days after our stellar herpetological cornucopia, in jestful fashion, Ralph was informed that until he found *and* captured a Rubber Boa for this group to photograph, his reputation was shot. He was no longer a hero—he was a goat (and we *don't* mean "Greatest Of All Time"). We do not take the escape of sitting ducks lightly in this group!

Thus it came to pass that the group known as "the Windies" decided that with the next adventure, Rubber Boas would be the target species to plan around. We wanted to give Ralphie a shot



This Great Basin Rattlesnake (*Crotalus lutosus*) was one of 22 observed at a newly discovered aggregation in northern Utah on 27 April 2019. See text below for details. This and all other images by Stephen Barten unless otherwise indicated.

at redemption. And *that* is why we wound up in northern Utah for our 2019 herp-a-thon. We would eat, drink and be merry in Utah! Let it be said, let it be done, amen.

As is customary, the planning for the Utah trip began well over six months in advance. We are forced to plan early in the game, in order to assure that all members of the party who *still work for a living* can make the necessary arrangements for time off. It is also a requirement to start planning early in order for typing boy here to line up a place to live for the six

days we intended to stay wherever we went. Finding an elegant vacation home for up to eight people to live is not always easy. It helps to get an early start on such things. The biggest problem with doing this is *always* getting whoever we decide we want as a guide to understand the importance of being responsive to something he might not live long enough to see. In this case, we chose Greg Brim, a long-time member of the Chicago Herpetological Society who now lives in Utah, to lead the charge. Poor Greg was ill-prepared for the avalanche of email terrorism that rained down on him as the result of his agreeing to be our guide. The creator of these emails always fears driving the guides off with the intensity and volume of such emails. It gets even worse when the guide is by nature a laid-back person, unaccustomed to the notion of acting now upon something that might never happen. Eventually, it was gleaned that Greg had found a Rubber Boa—in April of 1975! Yup! Surely lightning would strike twice in the same place? An N of one that occurred over 40 years ago? Hell yeah, let's all invest time, money and monkeys on *that* hot tip! Nevertheless, it was one more than any of us had ever seen, and I zeroed in, and obtained, a house near the place of Greg's ancient find.

Early on in the planning, I learned why so little of the many herpetological glories of Utah are understood. Ever since the rest of the nation began to pick on the residents of the area for their religious marital philosophies (which were none of their business), the "Utonians" have had good reason to be notoriously mistrustful of outsiders. Good on them, I say. I have been aghast to learn (over the course of the past year especially) of how poorly the flock of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young have been treated through the years by the petty and envy-riddled gentiles who surrounded them. Throughout the mid-1800s and early 1900s, their success was too much for their nearest neigh-

bors to take without retaliation. The secret success of the Utah folk can be attributed to a good work ethic, coupled with a strong sense of family ties, community bonds, *and* their religion. They have learned how to take care of their own, and the rest of the world could learn some of life's finest lessons by emulating them.

The herpetological websites that I found revealed next to nothing about timing and/or location of the target species of herps in our sights. (We speak of Rubber Boas (*Charina bottae*), Utah Milksnakes (*Lampropeltis triangulum taylori*), and any species of rattlesnake that could be found denning in numbers.) Along with Greg, I spoke with two other folk who knew a few things about timing, and like Greg, they suggested "early April." as being a good time to give it a try. Fortuitously, one member of the Windy contingent, Gery Herrmann, was planning a three-week-long rafting trip down the Grand Canyon that began 1 April and ended 22 April. We can be forever thankful to Dr. Herrmann for planning his rafting trip when he did, or we may very well have gone to Utah *weeks* earlier. As it turned out, we could not have chosen our target dates of 25 April to 30 April more wisely. But we get ahead of ourselves by saying so.

Fate also moved its huge hand in June of 2018, (while the Windies were squabbling over *who* was going to write up the California trip), when Greg suggested that I hook up with his friend Robert "Rob" Winward. Rob had recently moved to Tucson, and was seeking the fellowship of Arizona herpers. It is an amazing piece of serendipity that Greg did this *months* before we planned the Utah trip, at a time when I did *not* know Greg very well. After a bit of a rough start, Rob and I were soon on the best of terms. Shortly *after* the Windies (Greg included) approved inviting Rob with us to Utah, Rob contacted me to say he had a friend, one Patrick May, who was visiting Tucson from the Greater Salt Lake City area. Pat wanted to see a Western Lyresnake (*Trimorphodon lambda*) while visiting Tucson. As these are right up my alley, and knowing of our upcoming trip to Utah, I agreed to join Rob and Pat to try to find one. On 2 November 2018, Rob, Pat and I hit my beloved Iron Mine Hill. We found the best of everything that Iron Mine Hill has to offer, including a *beautiful* Lyresnake under a moveable chunk of caprock. This was captured, posed for photographs, and released under the carefully replaced caprock. During the course of this memorable day, Rob and I played the fact that we were coming to Utah very close to our vest. It is nearly impossible to con-

vince any herper worth their salt to lead EIGHT PEOPLE to their favored herping spots. "By all means, Patrick—help us to put the herpetological kiss of death on your favorite places. You can *always* go find more." But by the end of our great day, Pat was so overcome with joy at the outcome of the trip that he was offering "If you are ever in the Salt Lake area, look me up." An identical pair of poker faces were artfully maintained at these words. Over time, a few emails eventually bounced around between the three of us, and the word that we were coming to Utah was out. Pat did not even blanch—he offered to spend what time that he could with us. At first, I had a hell of time convincing him that we weren't in the least bit interested in Smooth Greensnakes (which are considered a great prize in Utah). On top of that, he was uncertain that he could lead us to a Rubber Boa. Here is where my faith in our group took over, and I promised Pat that if he got us close to Boas, one of us would surely find one. (Yeah, right! Nuthin' to it! Just ask Ralphie the goat . . .)

The final logistics of how to get us all together were especially dizzying, and came down to last minute emails and cell phone texts. The Chicago contingent was flying into Salt Lake City. Greg, Rob and I would all be driving separately. For my part, I drove to our rental house to check the place out on 24 April, which was one day ahead of our rendezvous. Once again, we were to spend our days in Utah in luxurious surroundings, with a view to die for (Figure 1). I had ample time to explore the area around the house, which was located I already forget where, and found a canyon to my liking a few miles to the east. I find the words that were written in my herp journal to describe the meeting of the seven of us on 25 April perfect for kicking off this Utah account:

4/25/19: Plans change. Mike Dloogatch, Steve Barten, Gery Herrmann, and Ralph Shepstone pick up rental and meet Greg B. and I at Milagro's. John Archer's plan to fly standby failed! We go to house, Archer Lyfts in later. Rob Winward and Pat May will join us for breakfast tomorrow, and we will seek Rubber Boas. I am dubious—weather is cold!

Yes—a few words should be said about the weather. The same nationwide *miserable* 2019 winter/spring shenanigans that struck and continue to strike Chicago and Arizona also dabbled with Utah. Both the 24th and 25th of April were *perfect* in northern Utah, 75°F, sunny coast-to-coast, and mild breezes on



Figure 1. (Left) The view northward from inside our luxurious home away from home. (Right) (Image by Gery Herrmann) Looking to the west from the deck.



Figure 2. 26 April 2019. (Left) Patrick May belts out a hearty “Woo-Hoo” after finding the first Rubber Boa of the trip, while Rob Winward continues the hunt below. (Right) An in situ image of Pat’s Rubber Boa (*Charina bottae*). See text for details.

both days. *Of course* the weather conditions were perfect—we could do *nothing* on those days. The remainder of our stay was forecast for highs in the 60s, windy, and rain every day. And my brain was quietly raging: ***Whose idea was this?!***

Rob and Pat arrived at our house on the morning of 26 April as promised. Also as promised, they were fed a culinary masterpiece consisting of well-seasoned scrambled chicken abortions, fried potatoes resplendent with peppers and onions, and toasted bread of four different varieties. We all ate until we were fit to bust, cranked up the dishwasher, and headed for our first stop, a south-facing slope completely devoid of trees. The location was not fit for further written discourse, but we spent a thousand horsepower checking out the talus slides and a few buttress-like formations anyhow. The next stop was much more promising. A river ran through it, and a nearby footbridge allowed access to all that was on the other side of it. We took about ten steps toward that bridge when a scrawny, 45-cm-long Wandering Gartersnake (*Thamnophis elegans vagrans*) crawled into our path. Gery was quick to snag this, and a wild assortment of enthusiastic yawns and excited exclamations of “ho hum” followed this dull, dingy and drab find. Once we crossed that bridge, the eye candy of a magnificent, near vertical cliff drew us in like a geek magnet. The most vertical aspect of the cliff was perhaps 10 meters tall, and from top to bottom was lined with a magnitude of various-sized splits and mini-gashes in the slate-gray colored bedrock. The length of the cliff was roughly 35 meters, and it had a favorable, sun-catching south-by-south-west exposure. For another 30 meters or so in sloping height, across the entire length of the cliff base, was an assortment of boulder-laden talus. The boulders and rocks ranged from half the size of a man to sandy pebbles. Some scraggly shrubs and one lone scrawny tree adorned the slide. We were roughly 5 minutes into exploring this, when Pat suddenly lifted the cry of “boa!” Right off the bat, a bang-bang boa (Figure 2). This at 1037 hours, with an air temperature of 10°C (50°F), a heavy 100% cloud cover, 87% humidity, and light rain falling! The boa was found coiled in such fashion as neither head nor tail could be ascertained through the loose clumps of grass, twigs and stubble that partially covered it. It was one hell of a good job of snake-spotting on Pat’s part. (And had it been on the crawl, we might have become suspicious that Pat had planted it.

That sort of thing *could* happen when herpers are involved. If he planted this one—NICE JOB Pat!) Ignoring the man in the parenthesis, just like *that*, with a snap of the fingers, a dream that was 64 years in the making for me, and most of the others, was consummated. We waited until all who wanted to see and photograph the boa in situ to have a look, and then we took turns holding it and posing it for photos (Figure 3). With a new search image burned in our brains, we continued to hunt but found no more boas at this locality.

Today was Pat’s wedding anniversary, so he made the feeble excuse that he had to leave early as a result. While I felt compelled to lay some guidelines concerning a happy marriage to the lad, I let him go. What the poor guy didn’t know was how much women ***love it*** when men dis them for better things when such trivialities as anniversaries arise at improper times. Communication is key. Had he just taken a few minutes to explain to the little woman that their anniversary was just another day, and should *not* interfere with his chance for fellowship with such herpetological heavyweights as us, I’m sure that she would have understood. But heck, who am I to explain things like this to somebody like Pat? And since when do millennials listen to me anyhow? Pearls of sage wisdom from our generation are treated like a fart in a windstorm from the likes of them. Thus it came to pass that Pat left us at 1125—and missed the best part of the day!



Figure 3. Posed close-up of Pat’s Rubber Boa. As neither the head nor tail of this snake can be discerned with the in situ image, this shot was selected (out of many) to highlight both. Note the rain droplets on the flank of this snake, and the lack of scarring on its tail. A flawless snake!



Figure 4. Some courtship antics of Wandering Gartersnakes (*Thamnophis elegans vagrans*). We can't quite call it a mating ball; the author has chosen "linear pair bonding" to describe this event.

We were initially going to leave when Pat did, but the clouds suddenly cleared. We decided to stay right where we were. The area was a jackpot of habitat variety to explore. There was a boardwalk leading through a cattail-laden swamp, that in turn led into a North Woods-like setting of an oak savannah. Here we could hear the sound of frogs calling, a myriad of bird songs, and various other natural treats not commonly associated with Utah or the West in general. A pristine mountain stream flowed through a verdant meadow. The visual of this pastoral scene was dotted with fly fishermen, (which come as accessories to pristine mountain streams), flanking either side of the watercourse. The soothing sound of flowing waters accompanied the whoosh of their fly rods, and their artful, arching sweeps of the sky hung on a tapestry of distant, snow-capped peaks.

Meanwhile, another Wandering Gartersnake crawled onto the pavement in nearly the exact place as the one found earlier. This one differed from the other in that it was slightly larger. Keen eyes began to search the undergrowth on the other side of the sturdily built wooden fence barrier that separated the parking lot from the stream. Among the coarse grasses and the conical tops of beaver-felled tree stumps, Rob alertly spotted the form of a larger gartersnake. This one seemed to be the center of attention with the smaller snakes. One and two at a time, these would drift into the scene and twirl about on the larger one. True to their name, these Wandering Gartersnakes were indeed wandering into and out of the grass clump that the larger snake inhabited. We were witnessing the mass courtship efforts of the species. At no point did this action reach the point where it could be called a mating ball—but for want of better words, that is what we were calling it. It was more like a linear pair bonding, where one or two snakes at a time would slide in, rub off on the female, and slide back out (Figure 4). At one point, we counted seven different males within ten meters of the female. My suspicions are that had it been warmer, we might have seen them all converge on her at once. The time that this was occurring was 1312, the air temp was 17°C (62.5°F), with a 15% cloud cover, humidity of 60%, and the wind speed a gentle 0–5 miles per hour.

Shortly after this event, we left, stopping for lunch at a great little hole-in-the-wall restaurant aptly named "The Old Goat."



Figure 5. Ralph Shepstone scored this, the second boa of the day, with a little help from a strong friend.

Following that, we all headed back to the house. The Windies wanted to head back out to the canyon near the house that I had found two days previous, but the lure of an afternoon nap caused me to poopsock out of the festivities. Based on my verbal descriptions of how to get there, and where to park, they got there, and parked. This area was a much tighter canyon than our previous stop. A fast-moving creek roared through the bottom, the turbulent waters lined with rather dense forest. There were no meadows to be had here. What wasn't stream became rather steep slopes to either side of it. The canyon flowed from east to west, and the north side of the stream offered a good southerly exposure to the sun. The flank of this northern ridge held many abrupt boulder formations, each of which held its share of splits, gashes, and deep running holes. It was here that the Windies sagely ascended, broke ranks, and began moving in eastward fashion. At some point into the hunt, Ralph saw the rear third of a Rubber Boa slide under a large and unmovable boulder. Was it live, or was it *Memorex*? Once again, a Rubber Boa had eluded Ralphie the goat! Although he was faced with ridicule if it didn't work out, he called the others over, and explained the situation. Without hesitation, Rob's arms encircled the boulder, and without even grunting, up she rolled! (Reminder to self: If Rob ever tells me to "shut up and sit down," do it!). And now the chubby, 30-cm-long, iridescent brown snake that was head at both ends was in view, and Ralph made the grab. At that moment, his year-long status of being the goat was behind him. He is now on hiatus from goat-dom. As I wasn't there, I can't describe the excitement and electric rapture that swept through the group, but I can sure *feel it* as these words are written. There next ensued the usual round of photographs, one of which appears as Figure 5. While I was less than deserving, they bagged the snake, and brought it back to show me. On their way back to the cabin, they flipped a sheet of tin and found three more Wandering Gartersnakes. Each of these was as thrilling as the next.

When they returned to the house, I was seated at one of the two spacious tables in our kitchen, emailing both of my friends. They first put on an act of long faces and grim head shakes when I asked how it went. And then—surprise! Rob laid the boa across my keyboard, and we all went through round 2 of the

excitement together. A short while later, a team went back to release the snake beneath the exact boulder that it had been found under. Without a token of regret, Ralph's boa slipped back under the carefully replaced boulder, and returned to a more normal life. It was no doubt asking itself "What the *hell* was *that* all about?" Upon their return, there was the customary feast, libations, and happy chat before we turned in. (It should be stated here that in all cases (of beer), the true Utonians did not partake in the consumption of alcoholic beverages.)

The following morning, the gang of eight piled into three vehicles. We picked up Pat en route to his super secret spot, the "Milksnake Mountains." The Milksnake Mountains were located either north, south, east or west of our vacation house. It was extremely thoughtful of the Utonians to name the mountain range thusly, for the target snake for the day was the Utah Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum taylori*). The Latin nomenclature just used for the Utah Milksnake is in a state of flux, as is the entire clade of Milksnakes. Even the most fearless taxonomists are daunted by tangling with the enormous task of separating the fly scat from the pepper with the finer nuances of this widely spread and highly variable species of snake. The authors of the upcoming book, *Snakes of Arizona*, have completely surrendered the notion of calling them anything but *Lampropeltis triangulum*. And if naming them is difficult, finding them is even harder. Anybody who has this jewel of a snake on their life list can only hope for one in the afterlife, as it is unlikely to happen in this one. But we *did* have Pat as our guide, which increased our odds dramatically. The fact that he had found several in the Milksnakes gave us hope.

After a lengthy drive, we stopped at a nondescript meadow. Well to the west of us, the Milksnake Mountains rose to greet the sky. They dominated the entire expanse of the western horizon. The snow that covered the top two-thirds of the range clearly indicated that they were still locked in winter's frigid embrace. While we stood admiring the view, the mosquitoes descended in great numbers to feast upon our flesh. We put our backs to them, and entered the gently undulating, verdant plain to the east. Said plain was dotted with boulders of various size and shape, and these were upturned for a look underneath by all but the fatass of the trip. Up to this moment in time, I considered flipping rocks to find our quarry to be the lowest form of herping that can be had. To this day, I can count the number of times I have flipped a rock and found something cool on two hands, leaving a few fingers as change. My method in this pasture was to head toward a distant series of flat boards along a nearby road. Rocks are one thing, boards are another. I had found a fairly substantial number of Eastern Milksnakes under plywood during my formative years in Northern Illinois. Surely, finding their western cousins would be the same? It was not! I *did* find something interesting among the boards. There were several grave markers here. They were sawed from half-inch-thick plywood, arched at one end, painted white, with black lettering commemorating a name, date of birth, and date of death of one hapless individual or another. I figured these were the people who had entered the vicinity where Pat had led us, and flipped rocks until they died of heart attacks. Such is the determination of those who seek the western forms of milksnakes. One can only hope that the happy herping grounds of the after-

life is full of boulders that roll themselves over to reveal the snake underneath. For the next hour or so, we played a fun game of swatting mosquitoes with one hand, while flipping rocks with the other. At the end of it all, "Captain Standby" (John Archer), found a meter-plus long Gophersnake (*Pituophis catenifer*—PICA) under a three-foot-long semicircular cement culvert. The PICA here have blacker cross-banding than those to the south, and are attractive. We all gathered to photograph Archer's find (Figure 6), while slapping ourselves until our skin turned pink in an effort to kill the pesky skeeter swarms that howled about us.

As John had found his PICA close to the vehicles, we headed for these, and drove westward to get into the foothills. We parked just to the north of the center of a mile-long, south-facing ridge. Said ridge was peppered with boulders which were, according to Pat, of perfect size for milksnake residency. The perfect boulder was fairly flat, perhaps 4 inches thick by 16 inches wide by 24 inches long, and too heavy for a fatass to lift. This was no country for old men for sure! But we fanned out and began to traverse the length of the ridge. I soon fell behind. The rest of the crew was so conscientious about returning each perfect boulder to its proper moorings that I found myself flipping the same boulders as they had already flipped. It was a form of hell on earth, and I found myself daydreaming of hard labor in prison. Eventually, the ridge ended, and so did our fruitless effort. We headed for yet another canyon, where even more prefect milksnake rocks could be flipped, while enjoying the visual of different scenery. The road into this new canyon was a rough one. Since Pat knew where we were going, I put him and Rob into the front seat, and took the back seat of my truck. I flopped about side-to-side and to and fro in the back like a rag doll, my head and body getting battered against all manner of obstacles strategically placed there by a people who were getting even with us over a lost World War. But as bad as it was for us, we had the proper vehicle for it. Not so with remaining two vehicles, which soon fell behind. We stayed in touch via the talkabouts that Archer had provided. Once it seemed that they might never catch up, we arrived at a sharp left turn. Here, the road became a steep, boulder-riddled affair that would present a challenge to even my war wagon of a vehicle. More because there was zero chance of proceeding any further than having reached any hallowed destination, we parked in a dry stream bottom. There was barely enough room for the other two vehicles (should they make it) to park beside us without blocking the road. I agreed to hang back to guide the other two vehicles into their respective parking places while Pat and Rob started up the streambed.



Figure 6. 27 April 2019. John Archer found the first snake of the day, this handsome Gophersnake (*Pituophis catenifer*).



Figure 7 (Images by Rob Winward). Mike Dloogatch emerged as the hero of the day by finding this Utah Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum taylori*). (Left) The view from the top reveals that it might be either a Mountain Kingsnake or a Utah Milksnake. (Right) We were all confused as to the identity of this snake, until this image was produced. With a Mountain Kingsnake, the dorsal pattern would completely encircle the belly of the snake.

As there was no reason to be uncomfortable for the wait that followed, I set up one of the five camp chairs that were in the bed of my truck. A bottle with two red X's magically entered my hand, and I settled into the chair. When posterior connected with cloth, the best part of the day thus far transpired. Once the best part of this day was empty, another bottle, identical to the first, appeared in hand. It was at that point that the two vehicles came roaring up. The drivers ignored the poor guy with a beer in his hand who was directing them into parking spots, but somehow managed to select the proper locations sans his help. I sat back down, as it was the least I could do. Several other chairs were set up beside me, and the coolers began a crash weight-losing program. Mike quietly slipped away, heading up the streambed. Less than five minutes later, he returned. Well, to say "he returned" just ain't saying it right. Perhaps we should say "he made a triumphant entrance." For in his right hand, held aloft for all to see, was a colorful, 45-cm-long black, red, and white ringed jewel of a serpent. Without so much as a "woo-hoo," or a "Look what *EYE* found," he stepped into our makeshift bar with a Utah Milksnake in hand! (See cover image of this issue.) Well, *he* may have chosen to put on airs of nonchalance, but the rest of us did *not*! There was a brief moment of shocked silence while we all reeled our eyes (which were out on six-inch-long stems) back into their sockets. And then, the crowd went wild! We all gathered 'round Mike, and gushed our accolades. The snake was passed from hand-to-hand. At midpoint in the hands-on session that followed, somebody suggested that it was a pyro (Mountain Kingsnake). Maybe six years ago, a pyro would have knocked our socks off. But I found myself wishing "*Please, no! Not a pyro! Please don't let it be one of those!*" When the snake made it to my hands, I must confess that at first, I wasn't sure *what* it was. In fact, when these words were written nearly a month later, I *still* wasn't sure. By that point in time, I had lined up every image of Utah Milksnake in my collection (seven individuals), and a good smattering of pyros. Truth be told, Mike's find more closely resembled the pyros than any of the milksnakes. But when it was in my hands, I noted the shorter snout, and the fact that the rings did not encircle the venter. For these two

reasons, I went with milksnake in my journal. Just yesterday (25 May 2019), Rob sent along an image of the belly of this snake. (I had forgotten to take an image of the venter. Apparently, so had most everybody else!) There are *no* pyros in my image collection that have a venter like this (Figure 7).

Speaking of Rob, he and Pat were still unaware that Mike had scored the big one. I tapped the talkabout, and suggested that we had just found "either a milksnake or a pyro." Pat responded with disbelief, suggesting that we were joking. (No Pat, we don't do that sort of thing. To interrupt a productive herping effort with that kind of joke would be the act of an extreme amateur. That sort of thing will get you voted off our island—in a hurry!) Whatever enthusiasm we were showing over Mike's prize paled in comparison to the reaction of Rob and Pat. Presently, the sound of thudding feet, and the crash of headlong dives through bushes heralded their approach. As they came into view, they both ducked under the branch of an oak that surely would have clotheslined them, and high-hurdled a blocking patch of shrubbery. A-h-h—to be young again! Once they had joined us, round 2 of the excitement that a *great* find like this can generate transpired. Mike then led us to the magic boulder he had found the snake under. I brought my herp journal and Garmin GPS to the spot. The time the snake was discovered was 1232 hours. The ambient air temperature was 19.5°C (67°F), the cloud cover was 15%, humidity was 33%, and the wind speed a gentle 0–5 miles per hour. The elevation was 1,827 meters (5,996 feet).

As for the rock that Mike flipped, it was nothing more than a squarish, reddish colored affair perhaps six inches tall and wide by maybe eight inches long. Of all the "perfect" milksnake rocks rolled thus far, this one was the only one that proved perfect. For only a rock with a snake beneath it can be called perfect! There was yet another round of congratulations issued to Mike, without an ounce of envy being demonstrated toward the hero of the day. We were all happy for him, and despite his calm exterior, we *knew* that he had to be jazzed about it all. (I can't speak for the others, but I must admit that I continue to have bad dreams about the *pure shithouse luck* that was demonstrated here. My



Figure 8. This Western Yellow-bellied Racer (*Coluber constrictor mormon*) was difficult to pose, but finally periscoped upward to reveal the bright yellow underbelly that gives it its name..

wife keeps asking me about this “He picks up a friggin’ brick and finds it” stuff that I’m muttering in my sleep lately).

Once again, rocks were turned and replaced with increased vigor. Where one was found, there would likely be more. But as is often the wont of hepers, we soon left a potential sure thing to seek the unknown. A short while later, we were all bouncing about the interior of our vehicles again. We hit pavement, hooked a left turn, and eventually turned left at yet another road leading back into the Milksnake Mountains. We stopped at a dry wash that emerged from the eastern foothills of the range. As far as the eye could see, the wash was lined to either side with flat boulders. It was proposed that we would search here for perhaps 20 minutes. An hour later, the group was well over a mile away from the parked vehicles. It was at that point that Rob found two Western Yellow-bellied Racers (*Coluber constrictor mormon*). A few of us were well away from the place they were found, but we eventually all converged to either partake in or watch the photography session. One of these was estimated to be 90 cm total length; the other, a little more than a meter. They are extremely pleasing to the eye to behold, the dorsum being of a solid olive-green coloration, and as their name implies, the belly being bright yellow. Rob and Steve worked these snakes in very patient and skillful fashion, and were finally able to get the smaller to periscope its head skyward (Figure 8). Several of us drifted off again while the photography raged on. Greg got a quick look at a horned lizard—most likely a Short-horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma hernandesi*). I began a sweeping return to the vehicles again, flipping the few boulders that appeared en route. Once I got to my truck, a longing glance westward revealed several long ridges with exposed bands of bedrock and abrupt battlements of basaltic formations running along their lengths. Some of these formations had favorable south and southeast exposure. These distant formations beckoned me, as I knew that they may very well contain rattlesnakes. I tapped on my talkabout, and informed the group that I was going to seek a road into this area. I would return in an hour to report what I found. I could not resist tossing some taunts in the direction of the rock-flipping fools as I left. I informed them that I was going to find a place where we could *hike like men*, and find snakes without hoping for some mindless habitat disturbance to produce a snake. With those curt and impolite words, I rolled toward the

distant formations. The road I was driving eventually forked, and the right fork led to exactly where I wanted to go. Upon my return, I found everybody but Rob and Pat back at the vehicles. Once again, the talkabouts proved to be priceless, as Rob and Pat agreed to hike to the area I had discovered, while the rest of us caravanned in the vehicles. It was tough going, and only highly skilled driving got Greg’s RAV4 through some very rugged stretches. We eventually parked at a place where the road was deemed impassable. To show how slow the process of driving there was, Rob and Pat had been flipping rocks for the entire distance, yet still were poised to fall in step with the rest of us.

Directly ahead of us was row after row of jet black boulder formations, each roughly three meters tall by perhaps 25 meters long. Just as we began to bob and weave our way through these, Rob snagged yet another racer. It is unclear to me whether anybody went back to celebrate the occasion with him or not. In similar fashion, Pat was able to lay hands on a Striped Whip-snake (*Masticophis taeniatus* ssp.—MATA). He later suggested that as a lot, we seemed rather unenthused about it all, because nobody came a running at his announcement. A short while later Rob unearthed a Spotted Nightsnake (*Hypsiglena torquata* ssp.—HYTO). A few people could be seen trickling back toward that find. For my part, I had foolishly forgotten to bring a talkabout with me. But even that would not have mattered. There was no way I would be thwarted from continuing onward in order go back to admire somebody else’s find. For all I knew, Rob might have found another milksnake. It would not have mattered, I would not have turned back. I had yet to find a single snake on this trip, and it was time to put a stop to *that* nonsense. Dammit! When Rob found his HYTO, I had chugged my way 80 percent up a ridge. There were two premium boulder formations at the top of this ridge, and *nothing* was going to stop me from getting to them. At my approach to these, I overturned a small slab of flat, shale-like rock, and scooped up a juvenile racer. This snake was perhaps 40 cm long, and like its cousins to the east, still retained some faint, light tan crossbands. The bright yellow belly cinched the identification of this snake. There was not much left to do but take a reverse selfie sort of image of the snake in hand, and release it (Figure 9). My two premium formations yielded nothing, and I headed back down the slope until such point as I got to our new parking spot. By the time I arrived, so did everybody else except Rob and Pat. We had just started to set up the chairs, when Greg fielded a phone call.



Figure 9. Juvenile Western Yellow-bellied Racer found and hastily photographed by the author.



Figure 10. At the end of the day on 27 April 2019, Pat and Rob discovered an aggregation of Great Basin Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus lutosus*). This specimen was the largest found that day.

“They just found a rattlesnake,” Greg reported. Seconds after that, Greg received another call. “Now it’s *two* rattlesnakes!” They also informed Greg that the place where they had found these was near the road. We were *all* dog tired, and there was a near-rebellion at this news. The road ahead was rough, and there was no way we could get Greg’s RAV4 through the first stretch of boulders that blocked us. But Gery gamely said “I’m going,” and started hiking in their direction. There was no stopping it from that point on. We wisely emptied the bed of my pickup truck to make more room. We managed to squeeze everybody into my truck and the SUV rental, and slowly worked our way to where Rob and Pat could be seen. They were roughly a hundred meters above the road. Just above them, a lengthy swath of talus was observed. Knowing that the photography was going to take a while, we dropped five members of our party as near to Rob and Pat as we could. Greg and I continued onward in my truck, in order to scout for other locations, and perhaps find a better route out (or later, in) to the talus slide that contained our rattlesnakes.

When Greg and I returned, Rob was hiking below the talus, with the tail of a rattlesnake in his left hand, and my Whitney snake tongs in his right. The tongs restrained the head of the snake. The count had now grown to four. The dynamic duo were setting these snakes up in various habitat situations, so that we could photograph them with different backdrops. I was ignorant as to what species they had found until I was at the scene. They were Great Basin Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus lutosus*—CRLU). This handsome species of rattlesnake maintains a base coloration of light tan to dull yellow, with darker tan, oval-shaped blotches that are rimmed with a thin black outline. The blotches run lengthwise down the spine, from just behind the head to nearly two-thirds of the way down the spinal column. The blotches then morph into narrow rings of sorts, which eventually become narrow, dark-colored bands just anterior to the rattle. The belly is a bright yellow, not at all unlike the yellow of the COMO that we had found. The four CRLU that Rob and Pat had found and set up for us ranged in size from perhaps 65 cm (26 inches) to just over a meter (40 inches) long. I’m guessing that the sex ratio was three males to one female, based on head size and tail length. The largest male was a most impressive beast, who displayed a rattle count of basal plus 11 segments, the 12th

being broken. The rattle segments were of equal size, indicating that this was *not* a young snake (Figure 10). From that point forward, some were wrangling and photographing snakes, others began to pepper the talus slides that were topped by sizeable bastions of rock formations. Despite the efforts of all, nothing further was found. Pat and Rob hopped into the bed of my pickup, and we ground our way back to Greg’s vehicle.

The sun was setting as we jostled our way out of the network of backroads that had led us to our herper’s field of dreams. As there was much to celebrate, we decided to head for a place where we could eat, drink, and be merry. During the process, we learned that Saturday nights are busy affairs at the dining places in Salt Lake City. Our chosen Texas Roadhouse destination was so packed that we couldn’t find a parking place anywhere near it. We surrendered the notion of any libations to accompany our meal, and instead entered a nearby Culver’s hamburger joint. We got in and ordered just ahead of a massive crowd of people. I noticed something here that I *never* see in Arizona. As the tables began to fill, they were packed with children. It is rare in Tucson to see any more than two children accompanying adults at any dining establishment. Here at the local Culver’s, there were at least five children for every adult. As one who loves kids of all ages, I’ve got to say that there was something nice, something wholesome, about Saturday Night in Salt Lake City. I’m glad that I got to experience it!

Following the meal, we all said our good-byes to Patrick. This was to be the last we would see of him for our stay. He had led us to all three of the target species on our list. We owe him much, and I’m sure that everybody who was on this trip would *love* to repay his kindness and expertise. For my part, I’m hopeful for another round of Arizona herping with him. It would also be great to treat him to a little southern Illinois action. One fine day, either or both will happen. Patrick May—you done splendid! *Thank you!*

The following morning was wildly successful—if one counts six Great Basin Skinks (*Plestiodon skiltonianus utahensis*) and two Common Side-blotched Lizards (*Uta stansburiana*) as being wildly successful (Figures 11 and 12). The Chicago contingent was so unenthused with the skinks that not a one of them tried to capture or photograph one. In Arizona, skinks are considered big game. As I did not see a single skink on this trip, my



Figure 11. Six Great Basin Skinks (*Plestiodon skiltonianus utahensis*) were seen on 28 April 2019, but none were photographed. Image by Rye Jones.



Figure 12. Common Side-blotched Lizard (*Uta stansburiana*)—a genuine Utah *Uta*. But is the genus properly pronounced “You-ta” or “Ooo-ta”? In Arizona, there is much good natured bickering over how to pronounce it. Image by Mike Dloogatch.

frustration level was high, with nary an image to show of what the local skinks look like. (As Figure 11 indicates, they look very much like a skink.) I had to go outside our group to finally get an image. On the morning of the skink onslaught, we tried two canyons near our house. The first contained a magnificent talus slide that was fully half the size of a football stadium. The second canyon was the place where Ralph had found his Rubber Boa two days previous. Both efforts failed to produce a snake. We ended the morning with lunch alongside a roaring stream. We got back to the house at 1500 hours. The more footloose, die-hard members of our party immediately went back out. Mike remained behind to prepare some of the delicious stuffed jalapeños that Dave Barker introduced us to a few years back. Meanwhile, I rested my aching back.

As suggested earlier in the narrative, Greg had found a Rubber Boa in a certain location back on 1 April of 1975. It was to this location that Greg led Ralph, Gery, Steve, John and Rob on this day. And did lightning strike twice there? You bet it did! Upon their return to the cabin, Gery began to relay his story of the find. There is a vast and steep talus slide that he was exploring, and all that he was finding was look-alike sticks among the rocks. Suddenly, one of the sticks began to move, and . . . (at this point in his story, everybody but me lapsed into a coma. Since I had made the mistake of bringing out my herp journal, Gery suddenly directed his story at me) “and I want you to write down that it was a Rubber Boa *this long!*” (He stretches his fingertips to indicate roughly 18 inches). I no sooner got this down, when he went on to continue his dialogue directly at me, while everybody else was seeking a can of drain cleaner to consume. “And I want you to write down that I am very, very happy man!” I wrote down: “Gery is a very, very happy man.” I also added the word “ecstatic!!” (Figure 13). It is interesting to note that Greg’s Rubber Boa of over 44 years ago translated into us settling into an area that quickly yielded three more. We couldn’t have done *any* of it without you, Greg!

Rob went to visit his family that evening. Hence, he missed our traditional steak dinner feast. Before departing, we made arrangements to meet with him “tomorrow” back at the talus slide that had produced the rattlesnakes the day before. I had named the place “Mosquito Ridge,” with our first visit. It is



Figure 13. Gery Herrmann was “very, very happy” to have found this third and final Rubber Boa of the trip. With an estimated length of 18 inches, this was the biggest of the lot. The snake was found at a locality where Greg Brim found one over 40 years ago.

hoped that the name will not reveal the exact location. All that one needs to do to find it is to seek the largest mosquito swarm in all Utah, turn into it—and you are there! As the forecast promised the weather to be on the cool side, and the drive in was a long one, we chose high noon as the time to meet him. The feast was magnificent, and the following morning was one of leisure. Gery’s daughter was pregnant, and her doctors chose this day to induce labor. We dropped Gery off at the airport, and happily (Gery was very, very happy) he got home in time to witness the arrival of his granddaughter, Sophie Loraine Dillon, into the world.

We planned on assailing Mosquito Ridge via a different route this day. This added a new element of excitement to the drive in. Three times we were thwarted by one of the roads to the place being too rough to navigate. And the normally soft, sexy voice that accompanies the new high tech cell phones that verbally guide people to places kept screaming “Surrender, Dorothy” at us in a shrill, panic-stricken tone. We finally shut her down when she hissed, in rather sinister fashion, “I would turn back if I were you.” At high noon, I gave Rob a phone call to inform him that we would be late. While in the midst of talking to me on the phone, he caught a Striped Whipsnake! “Whoops, here’s a whipsnake—got it!” The guy is incredible! We arrived at precisely 1230, and Rob greeted us with whipsnake in hand (Figure 14).



Figure 14. 29 April 2019. One of the three Striped Whipsnakes (*Masticophis taeniatus*) found on this, our last day of herping in Utah.



Figure 15. Five guys having fun at “Baby Bear,” one of the talus slides on “Mosquito Ridge.” In all, 22 Great Basin Rattlesnakes were observed by our group on the slope of this ridge over the course of two days. Image by Mike Dloogatch.

I am always the last person to leave the vicinity of the vehicles upon arrival. That is probably because I always take the time to write things down. By the time I was ascending the steep slope, many were already there, walking on and around the talus slides. As always, I was sucking the proverbial hind tit, and there didn’t seem to be much chance of being the person to find anything. The nature of these slides can be closely matched to the story of the three bears. There was a papa slide, a mamma slide, and a baby slide. But unlike the fairytale, “Goldilocks” here found the papa bear slide to be “just right.” As soon as I arrived at the bottom center of the papa bear slide, a large male CRLU was viewed coiled in the grasses at the edge of the boulders. When our eyes locked, he rose into a defensive position, rattled fiercely, and began to edge into the depths of the talus. As Rob was the only person with snake tongs, I began to holler for him. He was out of my line of sight with the first yell, yet was at my side an instant later. When it comes to catching rattlesnakes, we work well as a team. Neither of us is afraid to move rocks, or make a bare hand grab when necessary. In jig time, the first rattlesnake of the day was posed in a nice posture on a stack of boulders, and the shutters began clicking away.

Before going any further with the grab fest that followed, the author feels the need to explain something. As has been suggested many times over in previous columns, grabbing and moving rattlesnakes from habitat for any reason is not a good situation for the snakes. My own normal code of conduct was violated here. I’m not going to blame the others for that, but truth be told, grabbing and posing was going to happen no matter how I felt about it. We herpers can justify *anything* we do, from killing field/pickling jar science to collecting DNA samples. Or from radio-telemetry to bringing them home to cage as trophies. Resisting the urge to preach or justify our actions any further, I will say that any time I have been in the thick of grabbing rattlesnakes for any reason has always been the most fun I’ve had in the field. This time was no different, and the biggest crime of all would be to not share the images and experience of it all with the readers. As was the case with the rock flipping, each snake was returned to its proper location when the photography was finished, and any disturbance of the boulders



Figure 16. “I got one here. No, it’s two. No, it’s three!” Actually, it was FOUR rattlesnakes; there is one hidden behind the one on the right. The future is bright for Pat May should he choose to start a study of any kind at this den. There is much to be learned here, and aggregations of rattlesnakes are good teachers.

was corrected.

The reader is encouraged with a heartfelt “do as I say, and not as I do” statement with regards to the events that followed on Mosquito Ridge. Can we have some fun now? During this entire Utah trip, each of us had the chance to be heroes. For the first hour at Mosquito Ridge, it was the Roger Repp show. *How I love it when herping becomes the Roger Repp show!* There was a time when it was *always* the Roger Repp show. Those times grew more and more infrequent through the years, as age and an ailing body have taken its toll. But for one brief and glorious hour on this day of 29 April 2019, it all came back. Mike Dloogatch can walk about displaying an air of modesty while displaying the ultimate find of the trip if he wants. Rog wants to brag! Rog *needs* to brag. He found the first eight rattlesnakes this day. Four of these were found *in situ* (Figures 15 and 16), and even more amazing than that, he found two more by hearing their rattling. For once, both of his hearing aids were working proper, and he could hear the sweet music of the cascabel! And then, all too soon, the action petered out for the once-mighty Rog. The glory was short-lived, but much-appreciated. John Archer next stepped up to the plate, and found four more CRLU gathered at a gash-like entrance beneath a massive boulder. One of these, seen in Figure 17, was the most beautiful of the day. Rob went on to find two more. And finally, at the



Figure 17. In the author’s estimation, this *Crotalus lutosus* was the most beautiful of those that were photographed. But they were *all* nice!



Figure 18. The last find of the trip was this gophersnake, photographed as found on the road out of Mosquito Ridge.

end of the day when most of us were too tired to get out of our chairs, Steve and Ralph found two more. From 1230 to 1600 on this day, a total of 18 CRLU were encountered, not to mention

three MATA. The last find of the trip ensued on the road out, and can be seen in Figure 18.

In closing the books on this most excellent adventure, we suggest in humorous good nature that this author will welcome any errors suggested by those who attended this adventure with a shrug and an “Okay smartass—*you* write the next one!” In all seriousness, we have a fairly accurate accounting of a herping adventure that exceeded all expectations. In order to show how close this trip came to being a total weather-related *disaster*, on the night of 30 April, when everybody went home, the skies clouded, and four inches of snow and icy rain fell. The cold front not only lasted throughout the entire week in Utah, but engulfed the entire southwest as well. In short, we got in and out of Utah at just the right time. We end this adventure with Figure 19—an image of the Chicago Herpetological Society-based Windies who went on this escapade. It is well to permanently document such images now, as all too soon some empty voids in such images might appear. On that somber note: This here is Roger Repp, signing off from Southern Arizona, where the turtles are strong, the snakes are handsome, and the lizards are all above average.



Figure 19. 29 April 2019. Still standing at the end of it all, left-to-right: Roger Repp, Greg Brim, John Archer, Gery Herrmann, Ralph Shepstone, Mike Dloogatch and Steve Barten.

What You Missed at the May Meeting: Joe Cavataio

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We've had talks from all over the world, all over the United States, and all over Illinois, but perhaps we haven't explored what's in our own backyard enough. Cook County, Illinois, is the second most populous county in the U.S., and three of the five surrounding counties appear in the top 100 most populous counties in the U.S. What herps could we possibly find in our local area? Joe Cavataio wants us to know, and he was gracious enough to come to our May meeting and talk about the amphibians we might encounter in Chicagoland.



Joe Cavataio. Photograph by Joe Cavataio.

Joe talked of ways to distinguish between bullfrogs and green frogs, and between northern and plains leopard frogs. Bullfrogs are voracious and invasive in some regions of the United States. Green frogs like a lot of vegetation. Leopard frogs are highly variable in color and roam far from water. Wood frogs are not common here, but are being reintroduced in some areas by conservationists.

Two toads reside in our area: the American toad (*Anaxyrus americanus*) and the Fowler's toad (*Anaxyrus fowleri*).

From our website:

Joe is a lifelong naturalist with a focus on herpetology, particularly in urban areas and where the natural landscape has been altered by humans. Food scientist during the week and field herper on weekends, he enjoys getting wet and dirty in pursuit of reptiles and amphibians and doing all he can within his power to play a role in conservation.

Joe has given this lecture to diverse groups, many of which have only basic knowledge of amphibians. He began with an overview of amphibians, ranging from their tetrapod classification to their distant relationship to reptiles, from their need for moisture to their carnivorous diet as adults. I suspect that most readers won't need updating on those points, so we'll move into his comments on the Chicago area. The Chicago region has about 23 species of amphibians including 13 frogs and 10 salamanders. He's including Cook County and the five surrounding counties. That's a pretty good variety in such a heavily urbanized landscape.

Here's the list of the "true" frogs:

- bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*)
- green frog (*Rana clamitans*)
- northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*)
- plains leopard frog (*Rana blairi*)
- wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*)



Northern leopard frogs (*Rana pipiens*) are variable in color and can be found far from a water source. Photograph by Joe Cavataio



Fowler's toads (*Anaxyrus fowleri*) can be found in the very south of our area. Photograph by Joe Cavataio.



The large-bodied, small-headed salamander known as the smallmouth salamander (*Ambystoma texanum*). Photograph by Joe Cavataio.

Salamanders are less obvious than frogs, and certainly most people would be surprised that eight species can be found in our area. Four species represent the family Ambystomatidae. These salamanders are mostly fossorial creatures that are likely to be seen only during the breeding season or heavy rains. The large tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) is the most common and can be told from the somewhat similar spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*) because the tiger salamander's yellow spots do not form two regular rows along its back. Tiger salamanders are habitat generalists while spotted prefer the closed-canopy forest habitat that is also the preferred habitat of the wood frog and the chorus frog. The blue-spotted salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*) is locally common. Joe thinks that the blue-spotted is the coolest looking amphibian in our area and seems to be one of the boldest. It's more common to find one of these strolling on the forest floor than other salamanders, perhaps because its bright colors act as a warning to predators. The last ambystomatid just barely gets into our area. Joe thinks the smallmouth salamander (*Ambystoma texanum*) should be renamed the smallhead salamander, and his slide showed why.

Four other salamanders can be found here. Newts (*Notophthalmus viridescens*) are salamanders with an interesting life cycle beginning with eggs and larvae in water, followed by a two-to-four-year terrestrial stage called an eft, and then a return to water as an adult. Four-toed salamanders (*Hemidactylium scutatum*) are very rare in our region and the state of Illinois. They lay eggs in sphagnum moss above a water source. The young then slide into the water when they hatch. As with the four-toed, the southern two-lined salamander (*Eurycea cirrigera*) has neither lungs nor gills but breathes through its



The stream-loving southern two-lined salamander (*Eurycea cirrigera*). Photograph by Tristan Schramer.



An eft, the terrestrial phase of a newt (*Notophthalmus viridescens*). Photograph by Joe Cavataio.

skin. It tends to inhabit small clear streams. Our population is disjunct from the next nearest in central Indiana and is considered a glacial relict. Mudpuppies (*Necturus maculosus*) can grow to twenty inches and are fully aquatic. This salamander is now State Threatened because it is found only in limited areas, though fishermen in Lake Michigan routinely catch them.

Joe then gave us a list of threats, mentioning the usual suspects like habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation, pollution, and climate change, and said that, from his experience, poaching might be a big threat. But he also presented some solutions, from supporting habitat restoration to checking your window wells to contacting your local politicians. He mentioned Herpmapper (you know about that valuable app, right?) and frog-calling surveys. Then he was nice enough to include some further reading. While I should think that this audience is familiar with most, it's never a bad idea to repeat good sources:

- *Amphibians and Reptiles of the Chicago Region* by Clifford H. Pope
- *Amphibians and Reptiles of the Great Lakes Region* by James H. Harding and David A. Mifsud
- *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Illinois* by Philip W. Smith
- Amphibia Web <<https://amphibiaweb.org>>
- Caudata.org <<https://www.caudata.org>>
- The International Union for Conservation and Nature <<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>>

I know that even the experts among us gleaned some interesting points from Joe's talk, and it was a nice overview of an easily overlooked herping area. Perhaps the next time you don't have the time or money to visit Bolivia, New Guinea, Australia, or even southern Illinois, you'll be encouraged to herp our local area. It's not all concrete and cars!



Mudpuppies (*Necturus maculosus*) are aquatic their whole lives. Photograph by Joe Cavataio.

Herpetology 2019

In this column the editorial staff presents short abstracts of herpetological articles we have found of interest. This is not an attempt to summarize all of the research papers being published; it is an attempt to increase the reader's awareness of what herpetologists have been doing and publishing. The editor assumes full responsibility for any errors or misleading statements.

HIDING IN THE LIANAS OF THE TREE OF LIFE

R. C. Jadin et al. [2019, Molecular Phylogeny and Evolution 134:61-65] note that the brown vine snake, *Oxybelis aeneus*, is considered a single species despite the fact its distribution covers an estimated 10% of the Earth's land surface, inhabiting a variety of ecosystems throughout North, Central, and South America and is distributed across numerous biogeographic barriers. The authors assembled a multilocus molecular dataset (i.e., cyt b, ND4, cmos, PRLR) derived from Middle American populations to examine for the first time the evolutionary history of *Oxybelis* and test for evidence of cryptic lineages using Bayesian and maximum likelihood criteria. Their divergence time estimates suggest that *Oxybelis* diverged from its sister genus, *Leptophis*, approximately 20.5 million years ago during the lower-Miocene. Additionally, their phylogenetic and species delimitation results suggest *O. aeneus* is likely a complex of species showing relatively deep species-level divergences initiated during the Pliocene. Finally, ancestral area reconstructions

suggest a Central American origin and subsequent expansion into North and South America. (One of the co-authors of this paper, Anthony Carmona, received a grant from the Chicago Herpetological Society to fund his work on this study.)

SAND BOA SYSTEMATICS

Y. Sheikh et al. [2019, Herpetozoa 31(3/4):133-144] investigated specimens of *Eryx miliaris* (Pallas, 1773) from Sistan, east Iran, morphologically and genetically. The results demonstrated a high variation in topology and number of head scales, while mtDNA Cytochrome *b* sequences showed little differences. Comparison with sequences from northeastern Iranian *E. tataricus* (Lichtenstein, 1823) taken from GenBank provides support for the identity at species level of *E. tataricus* (Lichtenstein, 1823) with *E. miliaris*. As a consequence, *E. tataricus* is identified a subjective junior synonym of *E. miliaris*. Moreover, the authors strongly suggest not to use morphometric characters as the only source of information for systematic decisions.

Minutes of the CHS Board Meeting, May 17, 2019

Rich Crowley called the meeting to order at 7:40 P.M. Board members Dan Bavrisha and Jessica Wadleigh were absent. Minutes of the March 15 board meeting were read and accepted with changes.

Officers' Reports

Treasurer: John Archer presented the financial reports for April. John also presented a profit & loss report for ReptileFest 2019 alongside the reports from six previous years.

Membership secretary: Mike Dloogatch read the list of expiring memberships.

Media secretary: Kim Klisiak is making a list of who has access for each website. Old sites are still up, must get them closed.

Sergeant-at-arms: Mike Scott reported attendance of 42 at the March 27 general meeting, and 57 at the April 24 general meeting..

Committee Reports

Shows: Gail Oomens gave a quick summary of upcoming shows. There was a discussion of the need to be more selective regarding what shows we accept. It was suggested that we solicit donations from the larger shows (if they are making money from us being there). We need more members to help out at shows, not just the usual core of volunteers. Perhaps we can get the Junior Herpers to participate.

ReptileFest: Frank Sladek felt that just under 4,800 visitors was awesome considering the weather! Several new exhibitors said

they hope to be back next year. What worked: preshow meeting, volunteer fact sheet, scavenger hunt, turtle pen stations. We had enough volunteers for teardown; we were out by 9:30 P.M.

Adoptions: There was discussion of creating a drop folder to place photos of animals up for adoption. Kim Klisiak and Cindy Steinle are working to create a separate page on the website for members looking to rehome a pet.

Junior Herpers: Frank Sladek reported 30–32 people at the May meeting—lots of new families. James Krause spoke about turtles and herpetological art.

New Business

Rich Crowley announced that the Chicago Zoological Society will be hosting a Teen Conservation Leadership Conference, Tuesday and Wednesday, July 30–31. Several members expressed interest in helping.

Rich also mentioned that he intends to collect and compile information on the 50-year-plus history of the CHS.

John Archer moved to give seven specific individuals, who have volunteered at ReptileFest over the past decade, a thank-you letter from the CHS president, and a monetary award of \$200 each. Cindy Steinle seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by recording secretary Gail Oomens

Advertisements

For sale: **highest quality frozen rodents.** I have been raising rodents for over 30 years and can supply you with the highest quality mice available in the U.S. These are always exceptionally clean and healthy with no urine odor or mixed in bedding. I feed these to my own reptile collection exclusively and so make sure they are the best available. All rodents are produced from my personal breeding colony and are fed exceptional high protein, low fat rodent diets; no dog food is ever used. Additionally, all mice are flash frozen and are separate in the bag, not frozen together. I also have ultra low shipping prices to most areas of the U.S. and can beat others shipping prices considerably. I specialize in the smaller mice sizes and currently have the following four sizes available: Small pink mice (1 day old—1 gm) , \$25 /100; Large pink mice (4 to 5 days old—2 to 3 gm), \$27.50 /100; Small fuzzy mice (7 to 8 days old—5 to 6 gm), \$30/100; Large fuzzy mice / hoppers (10 to 12 days old—8 to 10 gm), \$35/100 Contact Kelly Haller at 785-224-7291 or by e-mail at kelhal56@hotmail.com

Herp tours: **Costa Rica herping adventures.** Join a small group of fellow herpers for 7 herp-filled days. We find all types of herps, mammals, birds and insects, but our target is snakes. We average 52 per trip, and this is our 10th year doing it. If you would like to enjoy finding herps in the wild and sleep in a bed at night with air-conditioning, hot water and only unpack your suitcase once, instead of daily, then this is the place to do it. Go to our web-site <<http://hiss-n-things.com>> and read the highlights of our trips. Read the statistics of each trip and visit the link showing photos of the 40 different species we have found along the way. E-mail at jim.kavney@gmail.com or call Jim Kavney, 305-664-2881.

NEW CHS MEMBERS THIS MONTH

Joe Cavataio
Angelique Harshman
Zachary Kline
Kristin Lanzisera
Marissa Mendoza
Charles Williams

From the company that developed the **first UVB lamp** for reptiles 20 years ago...

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Chicago Herpetological Society will be held at 7:30 P.M., Wednesday, June 26, at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Cannon Drive and Fullerton Parkway, in Chicago. This will be our popular and always well-attended annual **Show & Tell** meeting. Bring an animal that you find interesting for one reason or another and be prepared to give a short (under five minutes) presentation to the group. Don't be shy. Neither age (yours) nor commonness (the animal's) should be a limitation.

The speaker at the July 31 meeting will be **Michael Burger**, author of *The Dragon Traders: A Collective History of the Reptile Trade in America and the Age of Herpetoculture*. Michael is a long-time CHS member who currently resides in Texas. His program is entitled "The Fascinating and Sometimes Profound History of Keeping Herps in America."

The regular monthly meetings of the Chicago Herpetological Society take place at Chicago's newest museum—the **Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum**. This beautiful building is at Fullerton Parkway and Cannon Drive, directly across Fullerton from the Lincoln Park Zoo. Meetings are held the last Wednesday of each month, from 7:30 P.M. through 9:30 P.M. Parking is free on Cannon Drive. A plethora of CTA buses stop nearby.

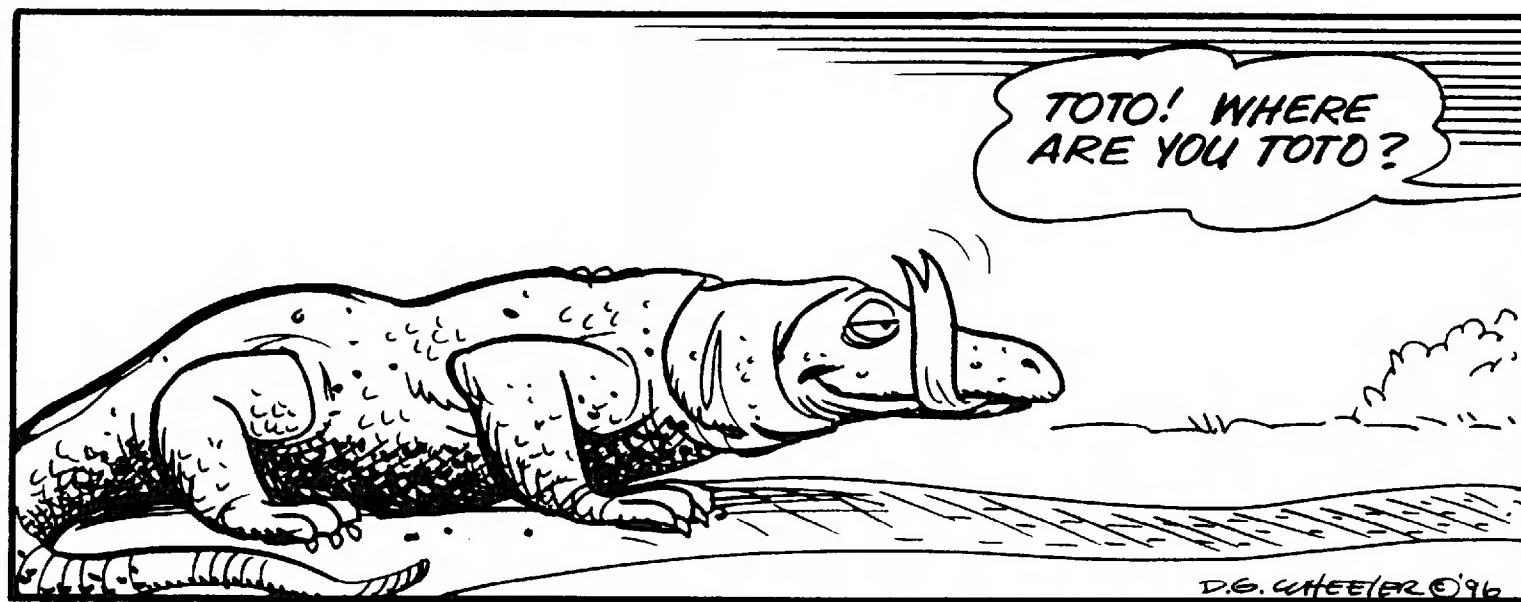
Board of Directors Meeting

Are you interested in how the decisions are made that determine how the Chicago Herpetological Society runs? And would you like to have input into those decisions? The next board meeting, will take place at 7:30 P.M., July 19, 2019, at Papa Passero's Pizzeria, 6326 S. Cass Ave., Westmont. If you think you might like to attend, please email rcrowley@chicagoherp.org.

The Chicago Turtle Club

The monthly meetings of the Chicago Turtle Club are informal; questions, children and animals are welcome. Meetings normally take place at the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski, in Chicago. Parking is free. For more info visit the group's Facebook page.

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